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RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3104
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000264

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN AND INL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/26/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SNAR](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: FORENSICS OFFICIALS HAVE THEIR OWN
FEARS AND FRUSTRATIONS

REF: ASHGABAT 261

Classified By: DCM Sylvia Reed Curran for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

(SBU) Poloff and INL Assistant paid a visit to the Interior Ministry's Criminal Research Center (CRC) on February 25 as part of Post's annual "end-use monitoring" of INL projects (reftel). We were met by the CRC Deputy Chief, Major Myrat Cherkezev and Major Bezirgen Orazmyradov, a CRC chemist. Under the terms of Post's Letter of Agreement with the Ministry, the two officials showed us the equipment and vehicles donated under the DOJ/ICITAP Forensic Lab Support Project, including computers, lab equipment and two Lada sedans.

12. (SBU) By any standard, both officials were unusually welcoming. They were also talkative, and had difficulty containing their enthusiasm when discussing their visit to the United States a year ago to attend the AAFS (American Academy of Forensic Scientists) annual conference in Washington. (NOTE: INL has been funding the participation of several Turkmen forensics officials at the conference for the past several years.) At the conference itself, they were amazed by the array of highly advanced forensic tools and equipment. And then there was Washington itself." They said they particularly enjoyed visiting the museums, and were astonished at the capital's "clean streets," noting that "Turkmenistan has a long way to go to reach such a level of development." They also mentioned trying (and liking) Mexican food, and were very pleased to have been invited to the homes of two DOJ officials during their week at the conference.

TURF BATTLES

13. (C) While pointing out the donated lab equipment, which included a gas chromatograph and infrared spectrophotometer, Major Cherkezev told us that they had been "a little worried" that the new State Counter Narcotics Service (SCNS) had been planning to assume control of all of the Interior Ministry's drug detection equipment and expertise when it was established a year ago. They were ultimately relieved to learn that the SCNS plans to have its own lab and forensics experts. Somewhat derisively, he referred to the SCNS as an "infant," which, like all children, had to start out taking "baby steps".

INTERNET GRUMBLES

¶4. (C) When viewing the donated computer equipment, Poloff inquired as to whether the CRC has access to the internet. Cherkezov said, "An internet connection was part of the ICITAP project, but the Ministry won't let us have it here." Looking over at his colleague and rolling his eyes, he said, "The only place with internet is over in the Ministry's headquarters. But I've never seen the inside of that (internet) room, have you?" Both officials were delighted to learn that ICITAP officials may pay a visit to Turkmenistan in the coming months. However, they then asked (again, rather irreverently), "Has our ministry given them permission to come?" (Poloff assured them that we would, of course, follow established procedures for such a visit).

CONFISCATED VEHICLES

¶5. (C) Outside the CRC, when viewing the donating vehicles, Orazmyradov pointed to a row of expensive cars, including a BMW and several SUVs. He whispered, "Those are all cars seized in drug raids recently." The Ministry seems to have a process for requisitioning vehicles such as those, for in the next lot were several late-model cars, including a Mercedes SUV, bearing the familiar green Turkmen government license plates. These cars, he explained, had been seized and then "appropriated" by the Ministry.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: We were both surprised and pleased that our hosts felt so comfortable discussing their concerns and grievances with us. As we have often repeated, when it comes

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to Turkmenistan, exchange visits reap benefits that far exceed the cost. END COMMENT.
MILES